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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a baseline about the status of career counseling outcomes research. It notes that few practitioners or researchers question the effectiveness of career counseling or related career interventions in the broad sense, yet the quality and comprehensiveness of the research deserves greater scrutiny in light of the field's broad scope and lack of consensus about outcome measures. This paper includes: (1) a brief description of career counseling outcomes with reference to where career interventions are provided; (2) an analysis of the quantity and quality of career counseling outcomes research; (3) a discussion of major significant research findings; (4) identification of notable trends or developments in career outcomes research; (5) a discussion of needed areas of focus for future research; (6) implications for counselor education and counseling practice; and (7) an assessment of the relationship among outcome research, counselor education, and career counseling practice. The paper concludes that providing a baseline of career counseling research outcomes and commentary to issues critical to counselor educators and practice is only a beginning. A field as dynamic as career counseling cannot rely on what only a few know during a time when an increasing number of questions are asked of it. (ABL)

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Career Counseling Is the Answer, So Why Keep Asking Questions?: A Baseline of Career Counseling Outcomes Research

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Few practitioners or researchers question the effectiveness of career counseling or related career interventions in the broad sense. Yet the quality and comprehensiveness of the research deserves greater scrutiny in light of the field's broad scope and lack of consensus about outcome measures. Herr and Cramer's (1992) interpretation of research results in career education, guidance, and counseling in the aggregate are quite positive, and there is "no longer a major question about the ability of career guidance or career counseling to improve or change career behavior" (p. 682).

Does career counseling make a difference and are career interventions an answer to an expanding number of contemporary problems? If so, why are many career centers filled with excellent resources but few clients? Why does a Gallup/NCDA (1987) poll illustrate the need for expansion of career information, programs, and career interventions? Why do policy makers, state departments, educational institutions and third-party payers hesitate to increase support for career counseling, programs and interventions? While Fretz (1981), Oliver (1979), Osipow (1982) and others have examined issues related to career counseling outcomes this paper offers a baseline about the status of career counseling outcome research. From this, practitioners may ask better questions about their practices while appreciating the need for quality program evaluation. Researchers and counselor educators may gain greater focus in framing research questions as they add to the literature, often devoid of the answers sought by clients and policy makers.

By focusing attention on career counseling, it may become a more potent answer to questions related to individual choices, the work world, and economic well being. Following the approach of the ACES and ERIC/ CAPS initiative, this paper incorporates:

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1. A brief description of career counseling outcomes with reference to where career interventions are provided;
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5. Needed areas of focus for future research;
6. Implications for counselor education and counseling practice; and
7. An assessment of the relationship among outcome research, counselor education, and career counseling practice.

Career Counseling Anticipates a Large Reunion

Delivery of career counseling has traditionally been perceived as a "test and tell" process for a small percentage of the population who could afford it or were connected to some educational institution. Presently, career counseling needs are provided within schools, work sites, community based organizations and private practice. Individual counseling, group counseling, career guidance classes, life work planning workshops, self-directed instruction, and computer and video technology processes are common forms of intervention. Political and economic factors shape the content and purposes of career counseling, therefore, differences in who receives and provides which services within which settings are great.

Through the early 1980's much of the effort related to vocational behavior found psychologists devoted to the measurement of interests, and the analysis of career patterns and development rather than assessing the effects of practice. Interest in practicing career counseling among counseling psychologists seemed limited and the clinical literature related to career counseling dormant (Spokane, 1991).

Yet career technicians joined career development specialists, educational counselors and an expanding number of human resource specialists in delivering programs within schools, community based organizations, government, and private industry. The mushrooming force of paraprofessional career facilitators on

campuses, within JTPA programs, agencies such as the U.S. Postal Service, and union halls document an expanded interest in career counseling for diversified populations. While for some, it is heresy to mention the value of services provided by outplacement specialists and a much maligned group referred to as headhunters or "flesh peddlers", there is a growing cadre of career counselors in private practice with and without a license. Clearly, there is an expanded base from which career counseling outcomes are provided.

Career education and life span development professionals have long suggested that the outcomes of career interventions merited more attention, research and status in the helping professions hierarchy. Comprehensive guidance and counseling models promoted program evaluation and career development competency attainment. Career guidance, historically available for only some adolescents, gained greater appeal to learners of all ages. Skill, learning system and regional economic mismatches called for career competencies for all over the life span (Feller, 1991). "Career Counseling: An Old Friend in Need" (Dorn & Schroer, 1983) suggested career counseling needed to return to its rightful stature in the counseling profession. National studies (Chapman & Katz, 1981, 1982, 1983; NCDA,1988; NOICC, 1988); professional certification efforts promoting Nationally Certified Career Counselors (NCCC's); and standards such as ACSCI's for CID's, and NCDA's for career information reaffirmed the need for quality interventions as career counseling embraced increased demand, respectability and accountability.

From Career Theory to Practice and Outcomes

A succinct analysis of the quantity and quality of research in career counseling inevitably is limited by the disciplinary lens with which one views the literature. While discreet definitions (Spokane, in press; Rounds & Tinsley, 1984) between career "pure" counseling and career interventions have been made, one must acknowledge the considerable overlap between many of the outcomes of career counseling and expanding array of career interventions.

There are at least three major outcomes of career counseling-- making a choice, acquiring decision making skills, and enhancing general adjustment (Crites, 1981). Herein lies much of the interest in outcomes research. When and

under what circumstances should the focus be on one outcome rather than another? How does one isolate and fully describe the treatment variable? Observation suggests that counselors help clients process information related to each of the three outcomes through various approaches. This is done through traditional one-to-one career counseling as well as through interventions ranging from psychoeducational groups, to computer assisted career guidance, to bibliotherapy.

Research on career interventions is a relatively new phenomenon (Rounds & Tinsley, 1984) with little specific research conducted on career counseling in its pure form (Dorn, 1990). While Samler(1953) and Thompson (1960) earlier wrote about career counseling, research has focused on empirical studies of career theory rather than on counseling process or outcome (Spokane, 1991). Early studies on career counseling generated an impression that the inclusion of a career concern was more for the purpose of examining a specific social influence principle rather then for the purpose of examining career counseling (Dorn, 1990).

Hundreds of career interventions have been introduced to effect change in vocational behavior. Many are reviewed in the annual literature reviews of career development appearing in the Journal of Vocational Behavior and the Career Development Quarterly. However, Rounds and Tinsley (1984) suggest that these reviews, along with other reviews of the career intervention literature (Baker & Popowicz, 1983; Fretz,1981; Holland, Magoon, & Spokane, 1981; Krumboltz, Becker-Haven, & Burnett, 1979; Lunneborg, 1983; Myers, 1971, 1986; Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Osipow 1982, 1987; Pickering & Vacc, 1984; Rounds & Tinsley, 1984; Super & Hall, 1978; Watts & Kidd, 1978) rarely address how specific interventions effect measured outcomes, or base their interventions on a systematic classification of vocational problems.

With most career counseling research is dominated by the study of career theory, use of assessment tools, and product and program evaluation, career counseling practice is primarily not research based. Developmental psychology's theoretical and empirical advances in the last three decades (Jepsen, 1990) resists translation into what career counselors can readily apply in their work. However, career intervention practices noted within recent works (Burck &

Reardon, 1984; Crites, 1981; Gysbers & Moore, 1987; Healy, 1982; Herr & Cramer, 1992; Raskin, 1987; Spokane, 1991; Walsh & Osipow, 1990; Yost & Corbishley, 1987; Zunker, 1986) offer career counseling practices useful to meeting client goals.

The majority of quasi-experimental research has involved populations of college students lacking no-treatment control groups or agreement in operational definitions of outcome measures. There are few studies of the comparative effect of different career interventions on specific outcomes. Thus, the difficult task of grouping observations from which generalizations can be made is compounded. Few case and group case studies, qualitative or new forms of naturalistic inquiry are reported. The practicing career counselor measuring group outcomes prove of little value unless they speak specifically to client goals. For example, as R. Reardon and J. Sampson (personal communication, 2/15/92) advise, if half the clients want to expand occupations and half want to limit options, the Self Directed Search may show no effect because it typically expands options. In summary, there are numerous problems with the quality and quantity of outcomes research in career counseling as practitioners are driven to improve practices.

What Do the Major Research Findings Tell Us

Career choice and development theories generated impressive amounts of empirical data and influence on research and counseling practice over the last 40 years. Osipow's (1990) theory convergence suggests a relatively common base of concepts upon which to improve practice which supports Savickas' (1989) notion that "we need to determine which interventions work with whom and under what circumstances" (p 107). Fortunately, such documentation has the potential of directing future policy, assist in procuring funding and shape professional training.

Myers's (1971) examination of vocational intervention literature concluded that "one thing the studies of counseling outcomes provide to the practitioner is an array of treatment procedures of tentatively established worth" (p. 886). Fretz's (1981) review of career intervention effectiveness supported Takai and Holland's (1979) view that the evaluation literature of career interventions suggests that myriad, diverse interventions lead to small detectable gains despite differences in methods, format, personnel and costs.

In Career Intervention, Spokane (1991) suggests that evaluation of career interventions provide information needed to assess the effect of stated intervention goals and objectives. His distillation of literature reviews (1991, p. 213-14) offers a very thoughtful and helpful set of observations. In abridged form they include:

1. The results of nearly one hundred controlled empirical studies with a variety of clients using a full range of career interventions demonstrates moderate but robust beneficial outcomes.
2. Longer (at least ten sessions), more comprehensive interventions have roughly twice the beneficial effects of briefer interventions.
3. Long term effects of career interventions have been demonstrated for up to six months after treatment with little loss of potency.
4. Individual counseling is the most efficient intervention in terms of amount of gain per hour of effort.
5. Inventories and self-assessment devices are still the most sought-after and effective intervention strategies with computer-assisted interpretations enhancing their effects with written information and media presentations.
6. Job-seeking, self-presentation skills can be effectively learned using role plays, role models, and group discussions.
7. One can expect an average of one standard deviation of gain following a career intervention on measures of career maturity, decisional status, appropriateness of choice, and information-seeking behavior.
8. On the average, clients will seriously consider one additional career option following a career intervention.
9. Teaching cognitively oriented decision strategies to intuitive deciders is the only intervention found to produce consistently ineffective and/or harmful outcomes.
10. Low self-esteem and social skills individuals, with high indecision and low vocational identity, or those with unrealistic aspirations will have better outcomes in individual counseling than in self-guided or group interventions.
11. Minority and special groups will have better outcomes with more structured as opposed to more vague and diffuse career interventions.

Crites (1987) in reviewing evaluations of career guidance program and intervention studies (Campbell, 1968; Myers, 1971; Oliver, 1979; Fretz, 1981; Holland, Magoon & Spokane, 1981; Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Campbell, Cornell, Boyle & Bhaerman, 1983; and Hotchkiss & Dorsten, 1985) reinforced the importance of systematic activities which engage all students in career guidance interventions.

Within Foundations for Policy in Guidance and Counseling (Herr & Pinson, 1982), Herr overviews two decades of empirical studies that address the effectiveness of guidance, counseling, psychotherapy and related processes in changing certain types of behavior. He found that many interventions had been combined into programs of career education and career guidance and that studies of cost benefit analysis in psychotherapy do have significance for guidance and counseling as reference points for outcomes likely to be true for career counseling.

In the midst of a decade of school reform efforts, Drier (1989) argued that career development interventions had become a key instrument in developing achieving students, satisfied citizens and a productive workforce. His review highlights the work of Campbell, Connel, Boyle and Bhaerman (1983), Bishop (1985), Suk and Bishop (1985), Hollenback and Smith, (1985), and Mertens, Seitz and Cox (1982). Bhaerman (1977), Herr (1978), and Hoyt (1980) found career education in various forms delivered positive career outcomes. Through meta-analysis of 18 evaluation studies of career education (Baker & Popowicz, 1983), found moderate positive outcomes from career education treatments.

Spokane and Oliver's (1983) and Oliver and Spokane's (1988) meta-analyses, recognized as two of the best syntheses of the career counseling literature, indicate clear differences in effectiveness among intervention modes. The most important influence was "treatment intensity," defined as the number of hours and sessions of treatment received. Their findings recommended more attention to design and analysis issues, systematic attention to the development of a complete set of outcome measures and complete reporting of study details for purposes of replication, meta-analysis and actual use in practice.

Clearly, more professional counselors and non credentialed career facilitators are providing career interventions. While some provide services

with limited insight to the effects of their efforts or knowledge of recommendations from significant research findings, most career counselors hold interest and hope for improving their practices.

Which Questions Drive Research Trends Or Is It the Other Way Around?

Readers interested in research trends are directed to annual research reviews appearing within the Career Development Quarterly and the Journal of Vocational Behavior. Authors analyze selected articles and identify trends which invariably include use of broader psychological processes and life span issues to explain career choice and transition. New perspectives on career counseling as a mental health intervention, and changing demographics increasingly illuminate career problems unique to special populations. Assessment tools and computer-based interventions along with issues dear to the family, at-risk populations, and vocational adjustment also influence what gets researched. Unfortunately, research related to these areas can be reports of basic science research without practical applications or potential implications for counseling practice (Savickas, 1989). Numerous questions generated from practice or driven by state or national goals often fail to be reported or even researched.

Fortunately a notable trend in outcome research that will bring research closer to career counseling practice is the expansion of scientist-practitioner teams. A team approach to inquiry holds the potential for framing questions closer and more responsive to the immediate needs of clients and public debate about education, work force quality, and self efficacy.

Future Questions

Before suggesting which direction the focus of research might take, let me reflect on two items. A conversation (M. Savickas, personal communication, January 30, 1992) emphasized that many productive researchers whose work appears in journals have little influence on practice or policy. Might researchers soon commit to the issue of usefulness in their studies and find more reward in disseminating usable knowledge than simply "getting published"? Secondly, Herr's (1982) research agenda for guidance and counseling still offers considerable direction to any career counseling effect questions or outcome research proposed in the future. The following is offered as one such speculation:

1. What behavioral changes are required by which populations, under what assumptions? What educational, economic, social and labor market constraints limit the impact of career counseling?

2. What are the comparative effects of different career interventions on the same problems?

3. How are different career interventions and age, ability, special client group, race, gender, socioeconomic status related?

4. What are the longitudinal effects of specific career interventions?

5. What are the cost benefit/effects of different interventions to the individual, the employer, and society?

6. What are the effects of interventions on organizational change and personal productivity?

7. What language can be agreed upon so career measures can be standardized or classified, studies compared, and results disseminated to a wider audience?

To complement such research it seems imperative (Osipow, 1892) that improvements would be enhanced through development of a career problem taxonomy, from which interventions could be designed and outcomes selected. Answering these questions is not simple, as the context within which career problems present themselves becomes more complex. Even though, a sophisticated and diverse array of intervention techniques is available to address these problems. As Spokane and Watts (1990) speculate "the next generation of career intervention research will probably be an exciting blend of group and single case data that builds on the substantial research base of nearly 100 years of research, theory and practice" (p. 121).

<u>What's Expected of Counselor Education and Practice?</u>

Pinkney and Jacobs (1985) suggest that counseling psychologists in training and counselor educators don't value career aspects of their role as highly as those dealing with personal counseling, depression, and psychotherapy. While there have been numerous calls for increased emphasis on career development in counselor education (Hohenshil, 1982; Hoyt, 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1982; Reardon & Buck, 1980), reality suggests that career development remains a low priority. Often it is taught by junior or affiliate faculty within a stand alone

course. As students understand career to mean more than job, and counselor educators understand career development as a lifelong philosophy with a set of competencies (NOICC, 1988) rather than a course in occupational information or guidance programming, it's value increases. A commitment to teaching the skills needed to conduct career counseling outcomes research and evaluation studies can be enhanced, even as additional topics are called for within counselor education programs.

Career counseling within educational settings traditionally serve more affluent and younger clients with career choice problems. As changes in the workplace, family and economy create more career opportunities for adults, professional counselors in an expanding number of settings will note greater demand for counselor skills and interventions which enhance career adjustment. Practitioners committed to improved effectiveness and professional renewal will be eager to determine which interventions result in behavior change.

Until such a body of literature is available Spokane (1991, p 224) offers seven corrective steps to increase counselor and program effectiveness. In abridged form they include:

1. Intensifying the intervention through a longer period or different mix of strategies and techniques.
2. Reviewing the goals, objectives and outcome measures to see if they capture the essence of the intervention.
3. Reviewing the client's needs and problems.
4. Institute treatment plans which include goals, assessment devices and recommendations for strategies and techniques.
5. Engage a peer consultant to improve treatment potency.
6. Establish an advisory board representative of the client population.
7. Contact program dropouts, especially if dropout rate is more than 30%.

The present interests of counselor educators and practicing counselors may not be focused on career counseling or career intervention research. However, as increased demands for self knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning are presented to counselors-in-training, schools, agencies and private counselors, the merits of career interventions will

increase as clients ask "is my time with the counselor making a difference?".

As counselors become trained in more than "test and tell" approaches to career counseling, clients can expect to see strategies that empower clients to incorporate processes helping them to monitor their career development (Healy, 1990). Expanding forms of career assistance, a proliferation of materials, and techniques provided by an expanded variety of career "facilitators" require an increased amount of interest in evaluation (Holland, Magoon & Spokane, 1981). With so much change anticipated in personal and institutional needs, and so many tools available from which to choose, preservice counselor education and continuing education must accept the major responsibility for improving the status, quality, usefulness and dissemination of outcomes research in the future.

To Those Framing the Questions

During any study of outcomes research, behavior change attributed to specific variables must be considered cautiously. Deficits exist in both reporting and in the context of the methodology. When one considers the scope of differing populations, time perspectives and interventions, along with the dynamic context of labor market constraints and sociopolitical change, the complexity of providing career counseling based on research is amplified. While career counseling is an answer, we should remain modest and honest about what we know. Researchers and evaluators must be open to useful questions and committed to disseminating findings in a fashion friendly to the research community, practitioners, and policy makers. While practice will continue to improve as a result of career outcome research, career counselors are wise to recognize that some of the more critical questions about effectiveness are being framed by those outside our ranks. As a result, career counselors must delineate the overlap between psychotherapy and career counseling, clearly establishing a knowledge base and standards of practice, share intervention methods, and define successful outcomes and interventions (Figler, 1984).

While the counselor education, vocational psychology and career counseling community continue to improve professional standards in career counseling, the age of accountability, consumer advocacy and growing economic instability requires answers to immediate problems and urgently framed client questions.

As one scans the present status of counselors-in-training and notes that the majority of counseling students are middle class females, counselor educators need to be concerned about training enough counselors willing to practice and conduct research with an expanding number of diverse populations. Of equal importance is the realization that the existing research base in career counseling seems to have little impact on policy formation at local, state and national levels. Convincing arguments verifying the outcomes and effects of career interventions must be developed and disseminated to policy makers. Resources are needed to train a sufficient number of practitioners able to conduct the research needed to answer the questions that will be framed tomorrow. As career counseling is seen as the answer, may those asking the questions be convinced that effective career counseling needs to be available for all.

Providing a baseline of career counseling research outcomes and commentary to issues critical to counselor educators and practice is only a beginning. May this effort foster a commitment to the proposition of useful research questions, effectiveness studies, and dissemination efforts. A field as dynamic as career counseling cannot rely on what only a few know during a time when an increasing number of questions are asked of it.

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Herr, E. & Cramer, S. (1992). Research and social issues in career guidance and counseling. Career guidance and counseling through the life span. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers. Within the fourth edition of this classic text is a comprehensive and extremely well documented overview of the status of research in career guidance with sensitivity to research techniques and the enormity of possible questions that may be asked about content and career intervention application.

Oliver, L. & Spokane, A. (1988). Career-intervention outcome: What contributes to client gain?. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 35(4), 447-462. An extension of similar work in 1983 this standard bearer in terms of meta-analysis methods offers significant guidance to those seeking to integrate primary research studies.

Osipow, S. & Betz, N. (1991). Career counseling research. In C. Edward Watkins Jr. and Lawrence J. Schneider (Eds.), Research in counseling. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. A recent release with an excellent introduction to career counseling research with special attention to general designs of outcome research, measuring outcomes, intervention selection, and recommendations for further research.

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Spokane, A. (1991). Evaluating career interventions. Career interventions. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. With unique concern for the practitioner this chapter succinctly and clearly combines an overview of outcome research with special attention to evaluating diverse interventions and multidimensional rating scales.

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